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SUBJECT: POSSIBLE DETENTION OF AMCIT VIET TAN MEMBER IN HO CHI MINH CITY

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1.(SBU) Summary: Three members of the opposition Viet Tan party have apparently been detained in Ho Chi Minh City while trying to visit fellow Viet Tan members including Amcit Nguyen Quoc Quan (NQO). The three, Amcit Mr. Mai Huu Bao, Swiss citizen Ms. Nguyen Thi Xuan Trang and Australian citizen Nguyen Tan Anh, reportedly took food and medicine to the detention facility where NQO and the others were being held on the morning of April 3 and have not been seen since then. We have sought confirmation from GVN authorities and stated our strong concerns any actions taken against persons peacefully expressing their political views. We are also seeking to confirm the health and safety of AMCIT Mr. Mai Huu Bao through consular channels. Suggested press guidance is contained para 6. End summary.

2.(SBU) On April 4, ConGen HCMC received a call from Amcit Tammy Tran seeking the whereabouts of her friend, Bao Huu Mai. According to Ms. Tran, Mr. Mai is a member of the Viet Tan organization who came to visit fellow Viet Tan members in prison here, including Nguyen Quoc Quan. Ms. Tran said Mr. Mai came with the full knowledge and support of the Viet Tan organization. She said she did not know if he eventually reached the jail or not - she last received an e-mail from him just over a day ago saying he was "busy and would write more later."

3. (SBU) PAS Hanoi was called on April 4 by an American journalist saying he had been contacted by a Viet Tan member in the United States who told him that four Viet Tan members, including one AmCit, had gone to visit NQO in prison yesterday but none of the four have emerged since entering the prison. NQO's wife also told ConGen HCMC that an Australian and a Swedish citizen accompanied the Amcit to the prison. This afternoon the Swiss Embassy called POL Hanoi with an unconfirmed report that three people have been detained - one Amcit, one Swiss citizen, and one Australian citizen - all of Vietnamese heritage and all members of Viet Tan - who entered Vietnam with the intention of visiting fellow Viet Tan members in jail.

4. (SBU) On April 4, Viet Tan released a statement (forwarded to desk) identifying the detained Viet Tan members as:

- "Ms. Nguyen Thi Xuan Trang, 35-year-old medical doctor and Swiss citizen. Dr. Nguyen is also a member of eth Comite Suisse Vietnam (COSUNAM)
- Mr. Mai Huu Bao, 38-year-old electrical engineer and American citizen. Mr. Mai is a past Executive Board Member of the Union of Vietnamese Student Associations of Southern California and past President of the Phan Boi Chau Youth for Democracy.
- Mr. Nguyen Tan Anh, 28-year-old manager of a health-care non-profit and Australian citizen. Mr. Nguyen is a past president

of the Vietnamese Students Association of New South Wales."

According to the Viet Tan statement, the three went to HCMC at the end of March with the goal of visiting imprisoned Viet Tan members Mr. Somsak Khunmi, Mr. Nguyen The Vu, Mr. Nguyen Viet Trung and Amcit Mr. Nguyen Quoc Quan, who have been detained since last November. The statement said the three also planned to meet "later with other democracy activists."

15. (SBU) Ambassador Michalak attempted to phone Vice Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh to underscore both our need for information and our principled opposition to actions against those engaged in peaceful political activity. The DCM subsequently contacted MFA Director General Nguyen Ba Hung to make these points, stressing that we have a separate consular interest in the American citizen reportedly involved in the case. DG Ba Hung knew nothing of the incident, but requested specific information, which DCM supplied from reports received by the Embassy. Giving his initial, "personal" reaction, Ba Hung stated that Viet Tan is an organization dedicated to destabilizing Vietnam, and is thus a terrorist group. Those entering Vietnam to destabilize the nation "should be arrested." (Comment: Vietnam rejects the argument that the explicit statements of Viet Tan that it pursues political change in Vietnam via exclusively peaceful means, pointing to its continued "embrace" in its publicity materials of the late paramilitary leader Hoang Co Minh, who was killed during an armed incursion into Vietnam in 1988. End Comment)

16. (SBU) Following is proposed press guidance:

Q - Has the U.S. Embassy Hanoi or Consulate General HCMC confirmed that an American citizen is being detained in HCMC? Can the Embassy or Consulate confirm this individual is a member of the Viet Tan Organization?

A - We have seen reports that an American citizen was detained yesterday by Vietnamese officials in Ho Chi Minh City. We are working to confirm those reports.

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- We have no confirmed information on alleged affiliations of an individual said to be in detention.

- In those instances in which any U.S. Mission receives confirmation of the arrest or detention of any American citizen, we are legally prohibited from commenting on the case unless the American citizen has authorized us to do so by signing a privacy act waiver.

17. (U) This cable was coordinated with ConGen HCMC.

MICHALAK